

Frequently Asked Questions About *Phragmites australis* (Common Reed)

Marsh Restoration Project • Metro Beach Metropark and St. John's Marsh

Contacts: MDNR-Wildlife, 586-465-7214 or Metro Beach Metropark, 810-227-2757

- *What is Phragmites? Phragmites australis* (common reed) is an invasive wetland grass that is not native to Michigan.
- *Why is it bad for the marsh?* Phragmites crowds out native plants, forming tall, thick stands. It is aggressively taking over marsh areas within the Lake St. Clair watershed, including Metro Beach Metropark, St. John's Marsh and parts of Harrison Township.
- *What is the average height of phragmites?* It can grow up to 20 feet (6 meters) high.
- *How is it spread?* By roots (rhizomes) that can reach up to 2 meters below ground and also by seed, from the flower head of the plant.
- *Can common reed be removed by digging or pulling by hand?* Not really. Mature plants have sharp edges and rhizomes are very deep in the ground, making it impossible to remove by hand.
- *What is being done to control it?* Options for controlling thick stands of phragmites are limited and thus, require a combination of aerial and ground application of herbicides, followed by prescribed burning or mowing.
- *Where and when will the activity take place?* The project area includes marshes in Metro Beach Metropark, other parts of Harrison Township and St. John's Marsh in Algonac. The target date for herbicide application is September 8-15 (weather-dependent).
- *What safety measures will be used for the treatment?* The control plan includes a 50-yard buffer zone adjacent to the public land. During the application of herbicide, residents and park visitors will not be allowed into the treatment area.
- *What herbicides will be used?* EPA registered and approved aquatic herbicides (glyphosate and imazapyr). These are specifically tested for use in an aquatic environment. The MDEQ has approved the required permit for this activity.
- *What other control methods will be used and when?* Prescribed burning or mowing will follow herbicide treatment. Ideally, burning or mowing will be done in the summer. Alternatively, burning or mowing may be done during the winter/spring.
- *Who will lead the control effort?* Trained MDNR and Ducks Unlimited professionals will follow a control plan approved by MDNR.
- *How will the aerial operation work?* A FAA-certified helicopter with an MDA-approved herbicide applicator will release the herbicide over the specified areas.
- *How will people be notified?* Through public messages, signs and park staff. Information will be posted at key public entry spots.
- *How long after aerial spraying can people enter the area?* Residents and visitors may return to the park area soon after the helicopter has left.
- *How long will aerial spraying last?* Spraying of all areas is expected to take a few hours.
- *Are there other areas in Michigan where herbicides were used to control phragmites?* Yes it is a common practice. For example: Phragmites research and control led by the MDNR-Wildlife Division has resulted in hundreds of acres treated within the St. Clair Flats Wildlife Area over the past seven years.
- *How will this herbicide impact other plants and wildlife?* The only herbicides that are effective in controlling phragmites are broad spectrum. However, research has indicated that native plants recover within a few years after initial herbicide treatment. These herbicides have undergone extensive testing as required by the EPA. This testing must be done before the product is ever registered for use in the United States, and prove that the potential for unreasonable adverse effects to wildlife and other non-target organisms will be minimized when used according to label instructions.

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This project is a 4-year cooperative effort of Ducks Unlimited, Harrison Township, Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Sea Grant and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. Other partners/contributors include St. Clair Flats Waterfowlers, Inc., and the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission.